

OFFICE OF
THE CHURCH ON THE SQUARE

(South Congregational)

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PEABODY, MASS., Jan. 12, 1909.

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PASTOR FOR THE YEAR FROM JAN. 1st, 1908, to
DEC. 31st, 1908, inclusive. Read at the annual business meeting of
the church on Jan. 12th 1909.

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To the Officers and Members of South Church,

Dear Friends:- Not long ago the pastor received an invitation to an evening gathering at the home of one of our estimable members. In the course of the entertainment he partook largely of the refreshments served, and in addition received the largest piece of candy he ever possessed - a regular Gibraltar Rock of sweetness. Altho he is convinced that the candy was innocent, and the refreshments strictly non-intoxicating, yet he had a dream, a regular night-mobile (nightmare is now too slow and antiquated an expression to serve the purpose, for no one who lives by dodging automobiles could possibly be terrified by the approach of a mere horse, however fierce his aspect). The subject of this dream was the annual report which is due from the pastor to the church at our gathering here this evening.

It seemed to me that under the compulsion of some directing influence I compiled an enormous document which consisted entirely of a report concerning the things which I had not done during the past year. There it was in an immense volume of such size and weight that when I came to read it Deacon Moore, and Deacon Frye had each to put a shoulder underneath to help support the weight.

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And then I read, and read, and read, page after page and chapter after of the things undone whose doing would have benefited the church. And there you sat, looking at one another and nodding your heads, not in sleep, as tho it were a sermon, but in perfect acquiescence to every statement made. Why it was the most popular report that had ever been made in all the one hundred and ninety-six years of the history of our splendid organization.

But when I woke, and thot it over, I realized as never before that there are two sides to every such report as this which I am to bring to your attention; and that beside the concise and definite depiction of the energies expended and results achieved, there looms thru the mists of the imagination the indistinct outline of that great mass of the unattempted and the unaccomplished which might have been.

One fact, however, is very clear to every candid and unprejudiced observer, viz., that no living man can render all of the ministries appropriate and opportune for which a church like this affords occasion. South Church, and many another church near and remote, is like the lumber schooners which carry coastwise cargoes along our Eastern seaboard. A lumber-laden schooner cannot sink, and almost invariably is undermanned. And not unfrequently it happens that the skipper and his wife and the dog are the entire crew of a vessel which rightfully should have three men before the mast. Now a church of God will never sink no matter how inadequate, careless, or worn out the crew; but usually it is undermanned, and consequently much that might most profitably be accomplished is neglected and her decks may not at all times be "Ship-shape".

In such a case the skipper's business is not the uniformed

and simple supervision of a large and able crew, but the harrassed and anxious choice of the more absolutely necessary duties to the neglect of other less important. Now when a man, working under severe nervous strain, is compelled continually to select a few of many duties all clamorous to be performed, it sometimes happens that fatigue beclouds his judgment and he does not always surely choose the most important things to do. And I will not say that possibly your pastor may not have made some such mistakes; but what I wish to have this annual report make clear and certain to your minds is that thruout the just closed year there has been resolute, carefully directed, and continuous exertion on your pastor's part to perform faithfully those duties which have been selected as the more important occupation for his energies.

First of all, then, there has been the preaching of the Word. Ninety-nine sermons and public addresses have been prepared and Delivered during the past year. Think of it, some of you who found it quite a task to write two hundred words on the principal occurrences of the past year for our recent mid-week service. Almost a hundred studiously prepared, logically arranged, and earnestly presented discourses have been conceived and delivered the past year. But you say, "Well, what of that? Isn't that his business? I have so many other things to do." So do I. There's pastoral visitation enough to occupy every minute of my working time without looking inside a book, or writing a line of homiletics. There's administrative work enough that needs to be done in connection with this church and parish to occupy the entire time of an executive and a clerk as well. Moreover, there is teaching work enough to occupy the entire time of a competent instructor without consideration of the preaching, the

pastoral visitation, or the administrative work of which I have just spoken. Some of these sermons have been, well like what a friend of mine calls "The jerked meat of salvation" which is so very, very dry that it has to be chewed a great deal to extract the nourishment. Under date of March 24th I have in my private diary (which fortunately for us both you are not privileged to read) this entry: "At 7:30 I preached a miserable sermon on "Opportunity". And elsewhere in the book I have reminded myself that certain sermons were a disappointment to the preacher. But on the other hand there have been some notable times of inspiration when a theme has been quickened by the Spirit in the preacher's soul, has grown and lighted up with compelling power and brilliance, and the uttered message has vibrated with a music that was of the Lord and not the preacher. In all these I have faithfully tried to be a mouth-piece and forth-teller of His truth.

Among the extra and out-of town addresses may be mentioned a lecture to the night school; an address before the Woman's Club; lectures before the Men's Clubs of the Tabernacle Church in Salem, the Phillips Church at Watertown, the First Church in Natick; an address at a public temperance meeting of the W.C.T.U.; papers on professional topics before the Salem Association of Congregational Ministers, and the Pilgrim Club of Boston; and lectures in the congregational churches of Jamaica Plain and Ipswich. All these have meant considerable expenditure of time and strength, yet all are demanded by the ethics of co-operation whereby we ourselves in turn derive reciprocal benefits from the corresponding services which we receive from those without who come to aid us in our work. In that other report, to which I referred at the opening of this, I had a lengthy list of

manifold engagements for speaking out of town which I had been obliged for lack of time and strength to decline.

It is appropriate in this connection to call attention to some of the special services of the year which have proven of more than ordinary interest. One year ago today, which chanced to be a Sunday, the second annual charge to the officers of this church was given by the pastor, which I am led to hope has not entirely been forgotten. The Easter service, with its sermon from the text "He hath set eternity in their heart"; and the Reception Service a few Sundays later when eleven members were received into our fellowship upon profession of their faith, of whom eight were men, were equally, tho in different way, impressive. The patriotic service of May 31st, and the recent Masonic anniversary attracted a large and favorable hearing. On Children's Day, your pastor's program, published by our National Society, was used not only in Peabody but in very many of the congregational churches of our country including that of Dr. Gladden, the Moderator of the National Council, from whom some words of hearty commendation have been uttered. The communion service on November 1st, with five accessions to our membership left some impressions that I trust the feet of time may not obliterate. The Union Service on Thanksgiving Day, and the recent Christmas service with its doctrinal discussion of the infiniteness and unknowableness of God as the ground for the mediatorship of Jesus are also to be mentioned in this connection. Into the formulation and publication of these programs much loving thought and care has been expended.

Next to the ministry of preaching I would place the ministry of teaching, and here too the year has brought its task. The two

training classes for the instruction of our young people in the fundamentals of the christian life proved fruitful this year as before; and for nine weeks the pastor met each section once each week. Later those who united with the church received several weeks of special instruction on the nature and duties of church membership. A course of lectures was given to the faculty of the sunday school in preparation for the lessons of the year. And on occasional Sundays, in the absence of some regular teacher, the pastor has taught the class at the regular session of the school in which he is always present. A series of occasional bible readings and topical discussions have been conducted at the mid-week services, all of which have meant study, and not a little application of pedagogical principles. In some cases the pastor has assisted individual members of the church in the study of special topics, so that in the work of teaching he feels that something has been accomplished.

Next to the teaching is the work of church administration in its various branches. Unsparring labor has been bestowed upon this department of pastoral activity, so that in actual time expended this work ranks second only to the time devoted to the study and preparation of the sermons. The Church Cabinet has held its customary meetings at which the interests of the church in all departments have been faithfully considered. I cannot thank too heartily the members of this body who have so loyally co-operated with their pastor in this important work. A total of two hundred and fifty-six meetings have been attended by the pastor in his official capacity during the past year. This does not include any purely social gatherings where he has been invited or whither he has gone for his own instruction or amusement. The ten volumes of "The Brown Book" for

1908 have been edited and published, including a great deal of gratuitous and unnecessary running around after the copy for the various auxiliary societies which should properly be placed in that pastor's hands no later than the twenty-fifth of the month preceeding publication. If I had the power, I should catch and compel each member of the church to plan and edit one edition of "The Brown Book", and then I'm sure it would be a much more appreciated publication. For concise, compact, intelligent information concerning the current activities of the church I do not believe it is surpassed by any of the churches in the country. The editor of the "Church Work" department of the congregationalist says it is the best thing of its kind he has ever seen. Dr. Merriam of the New York Observer, the national Presbyterian publication has written an extended commendation of it in the columns of his paper. Communications are continually being received from distant points inquiring about it with a view to the establishment of a similar compendium. Dr. MacFadden of Danvers in the Maple St. Church, Dr. Hunnewell of Reading, and others more remote have paid us the compliment of imitation.

Along less mechanical administrative lines has been the outlining of the curriculum of pulpit instruction in order that our regular congregation may receive due and systematic teaching. The care and conduct of the mid-week service also comes under this head.

The latest, and perhaps the most important achievement along administrative lines has been the review, revision, and publication of the roll of members in the "Blue Book" which you have before you. It has required an incredible amount of labor on the part of Deacon Frye and myself ever since you authorized its preparation at the

annual meeting of the church last year. Innumerable letters have been written, calls made, and labor expended to make it as correct as possible, and we have no apologies to make for the errors which may appear. If any other two members of the church believe that they can perform the task to better advantage, we are perfectly willing to see them try. The plan of annual republication as explained in the book itself will vastly simplify the work for all time to come.

Next to the work of preaching, teaching, and administration is the important labor of pastoral visitation, and here the report is much briefer than in the document of which I dreamed. Upwards of four hundred pastoral calls have been made during the year, and there are more than four hundred calls which ought to be made tomorrow. Probably it is in this department of pastoral activity that the record invites its most severe and righteous criticism, and I am painfully aware of the shortcoming, and shall try to correct it in some measure during the present year by working on a revised schedule which regularly devotes more time to this labor than before. For any oversight in this direction I beg to be forgiven, and tell you honestly that it is a neglect of the head and not the heart. It does seem reasonable to me that as there are so very many of you, and only one of me, that ordinarily the initiative ought to come from you. I have always intended and striven to go wherever my presence was specially needed, whether particularly requested or not, but much time and unnecessary labor will be saved if you will habitually notify your pastor of any cases where his presence is likely to be desired or helpful.

Now this report, altho I can still hold and read it without the help of my two good deacons, is long enough, and yet much has escaped

the drag-net of observation. For instance there are the seven funerals, the eight weddings, the occasional attendances upon church councils and associations, the various state and district meetings and conventions all of which have taken some measure of the pastor's time and strength. And in accounting for his time there must be taken into reckoning those private battles of his own which his soul must wage, like yours, against the sin besetting. And so I stretch out my hands over the record of the year and say to the Master "Lord, these things have I ~~tried~~ to do for your sake and for theirs whom thou gavest me. Wherein I have failed forgive. Make strong my weakness with thy unfailing strength. Bless these my beloved people, and me their minister, that serving and being served, blessing and being blessed we may ~~walk~~ together along thy Way of Life." For, in the last analysis, I do not report to you, but unto HIM.

Will Arthur Dietrich

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